

St. Gabriel's Church  
4522 South Wallace Street  
Chicago  
Cook County  
Illinois

HABS No. ILL-1032

HABS  
ILL,  
16-CHIG,  
34-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Washington Planning and Service Center  
1730 North Lynn Street  
Arlington, Virginia

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. ILL-1032

ST. GABRIEL'S CHURCH  
(Roman Catholic)HABS  
ILL,  
16-CHIG,  
34-

Location: 4522 South Wallace Street; southeast corner of 45th and Wallace Streets, Chicago, Cook County, Illinois.

Present Owner: The Bishop of Chicago.

Present Occupant: The Rev. James E. Donovan, Pastor.

Present Use: Roman Catholic Church.

Statement of Significance: This building, now extensively altered, was considered to be John Wellborn Root's finest ecclesiastical work.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners (chain of title): The property has been under the continuous ownership of the Bishop of Chicago since the founding of the parish in 1880.
2. Date of erection: 1887.
3. Architect: Burnham and Root.
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: Drawings of the first design by John Root are in the collection of the Burnham Library in the Art Institute of Chicago.

The following description of the building was taken from: Harriet Monroe, John Wellborn Root (New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Company, 1896), pp. 149-150.

"... He [Root] felt the lifelessness and overstrain in modern applications of the Gothic to church architecture, and usually preferred the Romanesque. Rev. Maurice J. Dorney, for whom he designed St. Gabriel's Church at Forty-fifth and Wallace Streets, remembers that Root, in talking over the problem with him, said that people too often attempted to build "little cathedrals," instead of being content with parish churches. He thought that the Gothic style demanded heroic treatment in precious materials, and that the Romanesque was more suitable to a simple home of the people.

"St. Gabriel's Church is treated on large simple lines, and is one of the most characteristic designs which Root ever put forth, as personal as the clasp of his hand. The material is a warm brown brick, shading from red almost to black. The broad gable over the archway of the entrance, springs, at the right, from a campanile very noble in its proportions. This tower is square, with round tourettes at the angles, ending in conical roofs, the one at the corner of the building being a turret larger than the others. The corbelled belfry, with its pyramidal roof, imparts to the tower a lofty grace. The facade of the transept repeats the lines of the main facade, apart from the tower, with a triple window in place of the entrance.

"The interior is fine in the sweep of its strong lines. The choir is large easily accommodating two hundred persons, and a round-arched colonnade in the apse gives it an effective background. Root's beautiful design for altar, screen, reredos, etc., has not yet been carried out [1896]. Father Dorney praises the church for its perfect fitness to the needs of his parish and for its admirable acoustics."

5. Alterations and additions: A vestibule and entry were added to the north of the church c. 1914-1922 during the pastorate of the Rev. Thomas Burke (1914-28). At this time the church was also redecorated. In addition to terrazzo flooring installed in the aisles, entry and sacristy, the church received new pews, stained glass windows, and light fixtures. On December 8, 1922 three new altars were dedicated Saint Gabriel Church, Diamond Jubilee Souvenir Program, 1880-1955, p. 28/. The church was again redecorated in 1936 during the pastorate of the Rev. H. S. Trainor ibid., p. 407. Major repairs were carried out during the pastorate of the Rev. Cornelius Corkery (1944-1951). It was discovered that the steel beams supporting the tower had rusted, endangering the structure. The top structure of the tower was dismantled and rebuilt ibid., p. 45/. On February 6, 1949 a \$70,000 fire struck the church and necessitated another program of interior redecoration ibid., p. 46/. In 1954 the original pyramidal roof of the tower was replaced with a flat roof due to leakage.

6. Important old views: See Bibliography.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

The parish was founded in 1880 by the Rev. Maurice J. Dorney, the church's first pastor. At that time it included all the area south of 40th Street and west of State Street. The church is known as the "Stockyard's Parish" and was associated with the early settlement of the Irish in Chicago. It is recorded that Father Dorney traveled to Europe at the time when Charles

Stewart Parnell, champion for Irish home rule, was in danger of being expelled from the House of Commons because of alleged crimes. Father Dorney gave Parnell several documents which helped prove his innocence ibid., p. 67.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Primary Sources: Saint Gabriel's Church, Chicago. 3 views of first design, drawn in pencil and wash. Marked "no. 3" 39- $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 16- $\frac{3}{4}$ " John W. Root, Sr. Architect. Burnham Library, Art Institute of Chicago.

2. Bibliography:

The Archdiocese of Chicago, Antecedents and Developments.  
Des Plaines, Ill.: St. Mary's Training School Press,  
1920. p. 477, picture p. 260.  
Diamond Jubilee Book.

Monroe, Harriet. John Wellborn Root. New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Company, 1896. pp. 149-150; illustrations of St. Gabriel's Church: pp. 68, 71, (choir), 78 (front elevation-facsimile reduction of Mr. Root's sketch).

"St. Gabriel's Catholic Church To Mark Its Diamond Jubilee," Chicago Sun Times, September 25, 1955. Herb Graffis column. Chicago Sun Times, October 29, 1955. No page numbers.

Chicago Historical Society - clippings.

Saint Gabriel Church, Diamond Jubilee Souvenir Program, 1880-1955.

Photographs of interior and exterior; several old views before alterations.

Prepared by Larry J. Homolka  
Historian  
National Park Service  
August 1963

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This is a large brick church, considered to be one of John Wellborn Root's finest works. Now extensively altered, it once showed Root's distinctive use of Romanesque forms.
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The church is laid out in the form of a Latin cross, with the main entrance facing north and with a tower at the northwest corner. The nave is about 75' wide by 135' long, the transepts project about 12' from the nave, an apse at the south end of the church is semi-circular with about a 35' radius, a sacristy projects about 15' from the south end of the apse; one story plus basement.
2. Foundations: Stone barely showing above the ground line.
3. Wall construction: The walls are a warm brown in color, laid in running bond brick; they are flared out or battered at the bottom with stepped brick. There are deep, sloping brick buttresses. Trim is brownstone and molded brick.
4. Porches: Large brownstone porch added later at front, three bays wide, one bay deep, round arched openings capped with gables, gabled tabernacles between the arches.
5. Chimneys: One brick chimney at the southwest corner, new top.
6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The modern flush doors are in an added porch. The original entrance consisted of three arched doorways in the north wall. Having no entrance porch, it was approached directly by a broad low flight of steps.
  - b. Windows: Semi-circular window openings, arches of gauged brick, windows framed with piers or pilasters of molded brick with Romanesque capitals of brownstone, brownstone sills and trim, windows filled with later stained glass.
7. Roof:
  - a. Shape, covering: Gabled roof, hipped roof over apse, steep pitch with low eave line, asphalt shingles.
  - b. Cornice, eaves: A brick parapet with brownstone coping follows the line of the gabled roof at the north facade.
  - c. Towers: A square tower with circular corner turrets at the northwest corner of the church is made of molded brick. The upper part of the tower has been rebuilt and simplified. The original tower was taller, with a large belfry stage corbelled out from all faces of the tower, with a steeply pointed pyramidal roof.

C. Description of Interior:

The interior has a narthex across the north, a stairway in the tower at the northwest, and a broad T-shaped nave with transepts. The medium size apse is semi-circular; there is a balcony at the north end. Plaster ceilings are in the form of wide, semi-circular, ribbed vaults with low spring lines; groined intersection of transept and nave vaults; there is a ribbed hemispherical dome over the apse; the dome and vaults spring from round arched arcades. The interior fixtures and furnishings and plaster and wooden finishes have been extensively remodeled several times.

D. Site:

General setting and orientation: The church faces north at the southeast corner of 45th and Lowe Streets. It is on an open, level lot in a residential neighborhood. A school, rectory, and convent adjoin the church on the east, south and across Lowe Street on the west. The landscaping is informal with lawn and trees.

Prepared by Osmund Overby  
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National Park Service  
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